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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination
against Women

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Initial reports of States Parties

GABON

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Introduction

At the end of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace (1975-1985), women were able to evaluate the real level of their participation in national development at the Nairobi World Conference held in July 1985.

Women were unanimous in noting that enormous progress had been made in improving their status. Governments had indeed responded to the appeal made at the outset of the Decade in Mexico in 1975.

However, they noted that their status could have been still better had it not been for the world economic recession and - it must be recognized - the obstacle of prevailing attitudes.

Gabon, which ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women on 21 January 1983, is now endeavouring, as conscientiously as at Nairobi, to draw up a balance sheet of the implementation of the principles contained in the Convention. This balance sheet will indicate the progress achieved in each field, difficulties encountered and continuing obstacles.

SOCIAL ASPECTS

The principle of equality of the sexes has been adopted by the authorities in Gabon since our country achieved its independence. In that connection, the lack of measures specifically intended for women should not be regarded as a failure to enhance the status of women, but rather as an indication of the political determination prevailing in Gabon to make no distinction between men and women. All measures taken must serve the interests of both sexes.

A. HEALTH

Before 1987, information meetings for mothers were organized in the "Jardins de la Peyrie". The trained women staff soon found themselves overwhelmed by the increasing number of women seeking their advice. For this reason the first Centre for the Protection of Mothers and Children (PMI) was established between 1967 and 1968 in the London district in Libreville.

In the PMI Centres, various activities on behalf of expectant women, nursing infants and mothers have been set up.

The PMI midwife monitors the progress of pregnancy, and refers the future mother to a gynaecologist if necessary.

The qualified staff at the PMIs also monitor the growth of children from birth to the age of six - weight curve, height, feeding, vaccination etc. However, it has been noted that mothers only take their children to the PMI when they think they are not doing well.

In addition, at least in the major urban centres, a paediatrician has been assigned to the PMI Centres, in order to ensure that children are looked after as promptly as possible.

Post-partum mothers are asked to visit the Centre after their children are born. This, however, the women concerned do not seem to be doing. Similarly, women who have a significant albumin count during their pregnancy are recommended to go to the PMI one week after giving birth, in order to monitor the development of this irregularity.

In the capital there are now nine Centres for the Protection of Mothers and Children. However, it should be pointed out that the PMI Centres located in working-class districts are the ones most often visited by local women. In Libreville, the Peyrie PMI Centre is the most regularly attended: it is patronized by the residents of the Rio, Havéa, Kinguélé, PK5, PK7, PK9, Sotega and Nkembo districts among others. It should be mentioned that the large-scale attendance at the PMI Centres by women from working-class districts in which the birth rate is highest is reflected by a drop in the infant mortality rate (16 per thousand in 1984 in Libreville and its environs).

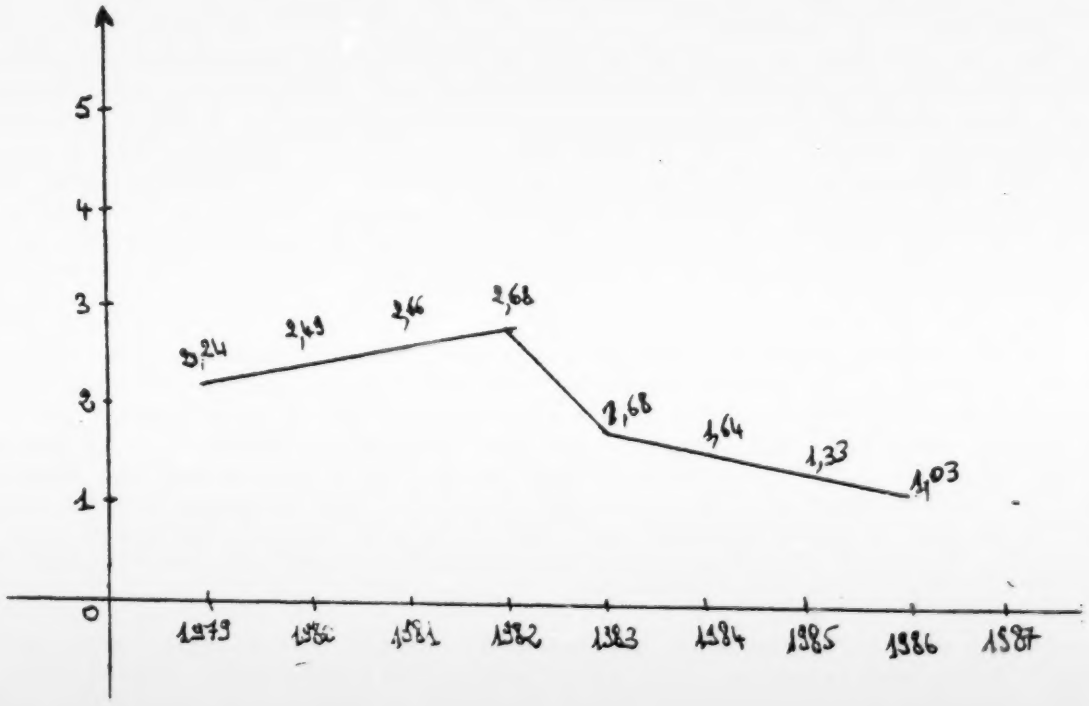
At the same time, the Louis and Glass PMI Centres, for example, which are located in residential areas, are little used by Gabonese women. Indeed, the largely middle-class residents of these districts conspicuously ignore the classes in nutrition, hygiene and other topics to which they are invited by the social workers through an official appointment notified to them in person. Such women only come to the PMI Centre to have their nursing infants weighed and for vaccination sessions. Some of them prefer to go to the private clinics providing this type of service. We should note that in the PMI Centres, unlike the private clinics which prescribe infant food in small jars, the staff recommend local produce which is both fresher and cheaper.

Ultimately it is West African foreigners who are the most frequent users of the PMI Centres in residential areas. They, however, cannot benefit fully from the advice given, since they neither understand nor speak French, which is the country's main language.

In the interior of the country there is a PMI Centre in each provincial capital. In other districts, women and their children are the responsibility either of a mobile health team, as at Makouké (near Lambarené), or of "progress volunteers", as at Lébamba, where French volunteers have equipped local premises in order to provide follow-up care for nursing infants and their mothers.

PROPORTION OF THE STATE INVESTMENT
BUDGET ALLOCATED TO HEALTH

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Amount	1 757	2 104	3 492	4 580	4 028	4 418	4 652	3 300
Percentage	2.24	2.49	2.66	2.68	1.68	1.64	1.33	1.03



B. WOMEN AND REPRODUCTION

In Gabon, as everywhere else in Africa, fertility plays a major role in a woman's life: in Gabonese society to be infertile is a traumatic experience for the woman concerned, and this biological defect is often the cause of divorce.

This sociological feature originates in the system of values of traditional society. In a society with a subsistence economy, to be a rich man was to have the largest number of "arms", i.e. children, since it was these children who provided the man with subsistence in his old age. Moreover, in this society with an oral tradition, the only imprint which men or women left behind them was their progeny.

This explains why in our society, in which maternity is extolled, it is far from being regarded as immoral for an unmarried girl to be a mother. In fact, in one patrilineal ethnic group in Gabon, girls are encouraged to have children before marriage, since these children born out of wedlock remain in the exclusive care of their mother's families. If nowadays some parents have reservations about early motherhood, their reasons are strictly economic.

This trend favouring an increasing birth rate has been strengthened by the political will on the part of the authorities to make every effort to increase the Gabonese population as rapidly as possible. This large country, with an area of 267,000 km^2, has only 1,200,000 inhabitants with which to develop its enormous economic potential.

Apart from the slave trade and endemic diseases such as sleeping sickness and malaria, the low birth rate has been identified as the prime cause of under-population in this region of equatorial Africa. In other African countries, young people below the age of 25 represent between 57 and 59 per cent of the total population, whereas in Gabon 52 per cent of the total population are under 25, and 42 per cent are between 25 and 65.

To remedy this situation, the Gabonese Government has built, and subsequently outfitted, the International Centre for Medical Research at Franceville (CIRMF), at a total cost of 5.9 billion CFA francs. The function of the Centre is to carry out laboratory research in order to combat infertility.

With this same aim of increasing the birth rate in mind, the Gabonese authorities have adopted the following legislation:

(1) Ordinance No. 64/69 of 4 October 1969 on the use of contraceptives states in article 1 that "the distribution and sale of contraceptives are forbidden except as provided in the following articles. An order of the Minister for Public Health and Population will list the contraceptives covered by this Ordinance". This Ministerial Order (No. 00121/MSPP/DSP/IP) is dated 3 January 1970.

(2) Chapter 4 of book III of the Penal Code (concerning crimes and offences against persons) states as follows on the subject of abortion:

Article 244: Anyone who, by means of food, potions, medicaments, violence or any other means, procures or attempts to procure the abortion of a pregnant woman or a woman assumed to be pregnant, whether or not she has consented, shall be liable to imprisonment for one to five years and a fine of between 24,000 and 500,000 francs.

The imprisonment shall be from 5 to 10 years, and the fine from 500,000 to 1,000,000 francs, if it is established that the guilty person has repeatedly engaged in the acts referred to in the previous paragraph. Doctors, health officers, midwives, dental surgeons, pharmacists and medical students, students or

employees in the pharmaceutical field, herbalists, truss-suppliers, surgical instrument suppliers, male or female nurses, masseurs or masseuses who have recommended, encouraged or employed the means for procuring an abortion shall be liable to the same penalties. In addition, the guilty persons may be suspended for a minimum of five years or totally disbarred from the exercise of their profession.

Article 245: A woman who procures an abortion for herself or attempts to procure such an abortion, or who consents to use means suggested or administered to her for that purpose, shall be liable to imprisonment for six months to two years and a fine of between 24,000 and 240,000 francs, or to one of these two penalties.

C. WATER AND ENERGY

During the three months of the dry season, women in some areas of the interior of the country have to walk for miles to find drinking water. For this reason, the authorities have undertaken an enormous village water supply programme.

It is planned that, between 1985 and 1988, pumps will be installed in 235 villages. By now, 170 villages have benefited from these installations. It should be noted that the upkeep of these fountains is carried out by the villagers themselves with instruction from the provincial representative of the Popular Education service. Thus the men put up a protective fence round the pump, while the task of the women is to keep the area round about clean.

In some districts which do not yet have electricity, a new energy source, namely photovoltaic solar energy, is being used on an experimental basis. Mention may be made of the village of Niali in the province of Nyanga in the south-west of the country and the village of Bolossoville in the province of Woleu-N'tem in the north.

The status of women in rural areas is thus improving considerably, even though, unlike urban women equipped with running water (or fountains) and electricity, they are not as yet able to make use of household appliances such as the freezer or refrigerator and the washing machine - appliances which make some household tasks less arduous and give the housewife some free time.

C.[BIS] PROTECTION OF THE FAMILY

In Gabon there are many families in which a woman is the only bread-winner. These heads of families are widows, divorced women and, increasingly, unmarried mothers.

(1) Widows

If a husband was registered with the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) or was employed in the Civil Service, his widow receives, as do the fatherless under-age children, part of the pension to which the deceased would have been entitled at the end of his working life (survivor's benefit). In addition, the fatherless children and the widow receive a death grant.

It is when rights to inheritance (in cases of intestacy) have to be determined that widows find themselves in a bad position. Under the current regulations, the Family Council designates an official heir or testamentary executor, whose function is to carry out the distribution of the property of the deceased between the various rightful claimants. Generally, however, the widow and orphans of the deceased are simply excluded from the partition. For fear of reprisals, it is rare that the widow has the temerity to lodge a complaint with the court on grounds of dispossession.

(2) Divorced women

Legislation has made provision for the protection of divorced women. Thus, a woman to whom a divorce has been granted on the grounds of either the total or partial fault of the husband is entitled to alimony. The alimony paid by the ex-husband takes into account both the needs of the ex-wife and the resources of the ex-husband. The purpose of the alimony is to enable the woman to continue normal life and to compensate her for the injury caused by the divorce.

It should be emphasized, however, that a large number of ex-husbands show reluctance to pay alimony. Here too, despite the measures adopted by the law to punish such recalcitrant ex-husbands, women do not dare to lodge a complaint.

Men may claim alimony from their wives. Hitherto, however, no alimony has been awarded to an ex-husband.

(3) Unmarried mothers

Fathers must pay alimony to their natural children, but men rarely pay this alimony, and women are once again reluctant to lodge a complaint with the court. Illegitimate children are not entitled to any alimony from their parents.

These three categories of female heads of family may receive family allowances amounting to 3,520 CFA francs per child per month when they are exclusively engaged in paid employment.

N.B. The Gabonese Government awards unemployed mothers whose spouses are also unemployed an amount of 1,000 CFA francs per child per month. The allowances are paid on a quarterly basis. To qualify, the applicant must register with the Office of the Prefect, submitting a certificate stating that she is not receiving other allowances. Unmarried mothers who are unemployed may also claim benefits.

(4) Common-law wives (concubines)

A common-law wife in Gabon is not entitled to any benefit if she separates from her common-law husband or if he dies. The same is true for inheritance: she has no entitlements, unless the deceased makes a donation for her benefit.

After the two years of cohabitation required by the authorities to qualify as common-law spouses, the spouses have an obligation of mutual assistance in the event of sickness.

It should be noted that the stipulated time of two years can be reduced if representations are made to that effect.

N.B. In the course of a ceremony, the man declares himself, before the two assembled families, bound to the woman from that day forward. Also, a common-law spouse may be compensated if he or she contributed to the running of any enterprise of the other spouse. The children of the common-law spouses are regarded as legitimate if they are acknowledged by their mother and father.

By way of illustration, the following are extracts from Law No. 15/78 setting out the general regulations for retirement benefits.

Section I

General provisions concerning retirement pensions

VI: Pensions of beneficiaries (assigns), chapter I

Beneficiaries of civil servants

1. Survivor's benefit

Article 37. Widows of civil servants, unless they fall within the scope of the conditions of service prior to marriage set forth in article 38, are entitled to a benefit equivalent to 60 per cent of the pension received by the spouse or of the pension to which he would have been entitled at the time of his decease. To this benefit should be added, as appropriate:

The total amount of the disability pension which the husband was receiving or which he would have received;

The total amount of the supplement for children, as provided for in article 20, which the husband has or would have received. This latter benefit, however, is available only to widows who have brought up children entitled to this supplement under the terms of article 20 above.

Article 38. Entitlement to a widow's benefit is acquired:

(1) If the husband has received or could have received a pension awarded in the circumstances envisaged in article 1, and if the husband, between the date of the marriage and the date on which he ceases to be employed, was engaged for at least two years in a pensionable occupation;

(2) If the husband received, or could have received, a pension awarded in the circumstances provided for in article 4.2, and if the marriage was prior to the event which led to the retirement or death of the husband.

However, if the retirement results from a lowering of the age limits, it is sufficient if the marriage was prior to the retirement and was contracted at least two years either (a) prior to the age limit in force at the time when the marriage was contracted or (b) prior to the death of the husband if death occurred before the age limit was reached.

Article 39. Notwithstanding the conditions of priority in article 38, the widow's benefit entitlement is recognized:

(1) If one or more children resulted from the marriage after the husband ceased to be employed;

(2) If the marriage which took place before or after the husband ceased to be employed lasted at least four years.

2. Orphan's benefit

Article 40

I. Each orphan is entitled, until the age of 21, to a benefit equivalent to 10 per cent of the pension which the father received or would have received at the time of his decease, unless the total income of the mother and orphans from one marriage exceeds the total amount of the benefit and any disability benefit which the father received or would have received. If that income is greater, the benefit of the orphans is temporarily reduced.

II. In the event of the death of the mother, or if the mother is ineligible for a pension or if her entitlements have expired, the rights referred to in article 37 pass to the children aged under 21, and the 10 per cent benefit is maintained for each under-age child within the limit of the maximum fixed in paragraph 1 of this article.

III. For the purpose of the above provisions, the following shall be considered as under-age children:

Children who, at the time when their father died, were actually in his care by virtue of a permanent disability which rendered them unable to earn their own living.

The benefit awarded to such children cannot be added to any other benefit or pension. It is discontinued if the child ceases to be unable to earn his own living.

IV. The 10 per cent benefit awarded to orphans may not be lower, for each child, than the family allowances from which the father would have benefited had he retired.

V. For the purpose of the present regulations, adopted children or children born out of wedlock who are duly acknowledged are considered as legitimate orphans.

Article 41. Under-age orphans of a woman civil servant who died while receiving a benefit or a disability pension or who is still entitled to such allowances are entitled to the benefits under the combined provisions of article 37 and article 40, paragraph II, above.

If the father is living, the under-age children are entitled to a benefit fixed for each of them at 10 per cent of the amount of the benefit and of the disability pension (if any) which the mother is receiving or would have received.

Article 42. It is not required that legitimate or recognized illegitimate children be born before the termination of service of their parents.

On the other hand, the benefit entitlement of adopted orphans is subject to the condition that the termination of service of the adoptive parent be subsequent to the act of adoption. In such a case, the conditions of priority stipulated in article 38 for marriage must be met with regard to the act of adoption or the adoption order.

Article 43

I. If there is a widow and there are children of two or more beds resulting from one or more previous marriages of the civil servant, the benefit as determined in article 37 is maintained at the rate of 60 per cent, while the benefit of the orphans continues, for each of them, at 10 per cent.

II. If there are claimants from two or more beds resulting from one or more polygamous marriages of the deceased civil servant, the widow's benefit is divided equally between each marriage, as represented by one of the widows or, as the case may be, by one or more under-age orphans. The orphans' benefit is maintained, for each of them, at 10 per cent, under the conditions stipulated in article 40.

III. If the under-age children from more than one marriage are orphans without either father or mother, the benefit which would be paid to the widow under article 37 is shared in equal parts among each group of orphans, and if the children of one marriage cease to be represented their share reverts to the children of the other marriage or marriages.

Article 44

I. A wife who is separated or divorced from her husband through her own fault or through mutual fault, and whose husband subsequently dies, is not eligible for benefit. The children, if any, of their marriage are considered as orphans without parents and are entitled to the benefit established in .... II of article 4 of these regulations.

II. A woman divorced through the exclusive fault of the husband, unless she remarries before the death of her previous husband, is entitled to the widow's benefit as defined in article 37.

III. A widow who remarries, or publicly cohabits with another man, forfeits her entitlement to benefit.

IV. If on the death of the husband there is a widow entitled to benefit under article 37 and an ex-wife who is divorced through the fault solely of the husband and who has not remarried, the widow's benefit, unless the ex-wife voluntarily renounces it or remarries before the death of the husband, is divided between the widow and the ex-wife, according to the duration of the marriage and provided that the widow's share shall not be less than half of the survivor's benefit.

On the decease of one of the beneficiaries, her share shall accrue to the share of the other, unless the entitlement is awarded to the under-age children.

V. If a divorced woman or a widow remarries and is either widowed, divorced or separated a second time, she may if she so wishes recover her entitlement to benefit and request that any application that may have been made of paragraphs I and III of this article be discontinued.

Chapter III: Common provisions concerning the pensions of beneficiaries

Article 48. The surviving husband of a woman civil servant or a woman member of the Armed Forces may, if he was not separated from his wife, claim benefit equal to 60 per cent, paid under the same conditions and in accordance with the same procedures as are provided in articles 38 and 40 of this Law.

This benefit, which may not be added to any other benefit or life annuity paid under old age insurance, may not be inferior to the basic minimum wage stipulated in article 19 of this Code. It shall cease to apply in the event of the remarriage of the widower, or if the widower is publicly cohabiting with another woman.

Article 49. If a civil servant or a pensioner disappears from his domicile and more than one year elapses without his claiming the arrears of pension or of life annuity owing to him, his wife and the under-age children whom he has left may obtain a provisional liquidation of the entitlement to the proportional pension or length-of-service pension for which they would be eligible in the event of the death of the civil servant or holder of the pension. The same rule may be followed with regard to orphans if a mother who is receiving a benefit or a life annuity for disability or is entitled to such a benefit or annuity has disappeared for more than one year. This provisional benefit is cancelled if the holder reappears, or if his death is officially established, or if the absence has been confirmed by a judgement-at-law. In these two cases, a definitive benefit is then awarded to the rightful claimants.

D. FAMILY LAW

1. Marriage

In Gabon a person is considered to have reached majority at the age of 21. However, persons may contract marriage from the age of 15 on, in the case of girls, and from 18 on in the case of boys. At this age, since the future spouses are still minors, the parents' consent is required.

With the agreement of the President of the Republic, a girl under 15 years of age may contract marriage for reasons of force majeure.

A legally married woman cannot obtain credit from banks without the consent of her husband.

The husband, if he considers that his wife's work outside the home is prejudicial to family life, may object to her engaging in such activity outside the home.

2. Separation

The required period of widowhood is 300 days. However, a widow may remarry before this period has elapsed on presentation of a certificate stating that she is not pregnant. The same time limit of 300 days applies in the case of divorce.

3. Parental authority

In the case of a legitimate child it is the parent who is first to acknowledge the child who is invested with parental authority. However, most women ignore this rule, and have their child acknowledged solely by the father.

E. ELDERLY WOMEN

The nature of urban life is such that old people have become marginalized. This notwithstanding, respect, affection and consideration for the old remain intact.

However, the present situation in which every old person is looked after by his own offspring should not lead us to ignore the fact that life expectancy in Gabon is becoming greater, and that the family alone will no longer be able to look after all its old people.

The National Pensions Fund (CNGS) already treats elderly women who do not receive any old age pension as needy persons. Accordingly, the Fund awards a pension to all such women who register with the officials, who travel about the country.

F. OTHER NEEDY WOMEN

The National Assistance Commission, after examining the files, determines who is most in need. This Commission consists of the following bodies: the Ministry of Public Health and Population, the National Assembly, the Office of the Mayor of Libreville, the Ministry of the Economy, Finance and Holdings, the Gabonese Democratic Party, the National Pensions Fund, the National Social Security Fund, and Social Affairs.

This Commission sits three times each year and awards the following types of assistance:

Continuing assistance, which is at a uniform rate and varies according to funds available. The minimum amount is 120,000 CFA francs per person per year, payable on a quarterly basis;

Assistance renewable every three years: the Commission awards this assistance for a period of three years, for example, to a sick person who is unable to engage in any paid employment. At the end of the three years, his case is re-examined by the Commission in order to determine whether the assistance is to be renewed or not;

A lump-sum assistance intended for elderly disabled people and disaster victims. This represents an annual overall sum of 30,000 CFA francs from the budget of Social Affairs. The assistance is awarded on an ad hoc basis.

In addition, the Minister for Social Affairs, Social Security and Welfare provides assistance in exceptional cases not dealt with by the Commission.

G. THE DISABLED

Disabled people obtain invalid carriages, crutches and prosthetic devices, as well as ongoing assistance, from the Directorate-General of Social Affairs.

This Directorate has developed a plan for establishing a production plant for prosthetic devices.

On the initiative of a disabled person who felt a sense of responsibility, a Disabled Persons' Club came into being on 12 December 1980 (registered on 22 June 1982 with the Ministry of the Interior).

A gift from the President of the Republic, El Hadj Omar Bongo, made it possible to build a Business Centre for Disabled People. The Centre is under the auspices of the Ministry of Social Affairs.

In Libreville alone, the Club has 300 members, of whom about 100 are women. According to the Chairman of the Disabled Persons' Club, there are more disabled women than are registered with the Club, but these women keep to themselves and prefer to stay at home.

H. WOMEN AND PROSTITUTION

In Gabon, like everywhere else, women take up the world's oldest profession: prostitution.

In our country, this traffic is regulated by law in order to avoid excesses. For example, article 250 of the Gabonese Penal Code states as follows:

Anyone, male or female, who engages in the following activities shall be regarded as a procurer and shall be liable to a penalty of imprisonment from six months to two years and a fine of between 50,000 and 1,000,000 CFA francs: ... (five typical forms of pimping, of various degrees of insidiousness, are listed).

However, since there has been a recrudescence of prostitution in our society, which is undergoing rapid change, Law No. 18/84 has been introduced in order to amend article 260 and paragraphs 20 and 21 of article 342 of the Penal Code.

This Law is aimed at deterring individuals who might think of selling their bodies. In order to tackle the problem at its roots, this Law states as follows in article 1:

Anyone who:

(1) Behaves in a public place in such a way as to incite vice, or who:

(2) By gesture, words, writing or any other means, publicly engages in soliciting persons of either sex with a view to inciting vice shall be liable to imprisonment for between three months and one year and a fine of between 25,000 and 240,000 francs.

INFORMATION

The campaign against all forms of discrimination against women entails that women be informed. If women are not aware of their rights, they can be deprived, exploited, etc.

In Gabon, all the media are under the control of the authorities. Information is disseminated in three forms:

(1) Broadcasting is the most popular form, since it is accessible to everyone.

The Government's unremitting efforts in this field have led to the establishment of five provincial broadcasting stations at Tchibanga, Mokokou, Franceville, Port Gentil and Oyem.

The broadcasts are in French and in local languages. The use of local dialect proves to be the best way of transmitting information among these rural populations which, for the most part, do not have a command of French.

(2) As regards television, the Government's aim is to cover the entire country. At present, Gabon has three television channels, of which the two most recent can only be received in the capital and its surrounding areas. There are three provincial relays at Lambarené, Port Gentil and Tchibanga, and there is a provincial network at Franceville.

(3) There is also the press, with at the forefront the national daily, "L'Union".

Every Wedenesday from 9 to 10 a.m., Radio Gabon broadcasts a programme by the Women's Union of the Gabonese Democratic Party (UFPDG) aimed at women and entitled "At Your Service, Madam". On Tuesdays, Thursdays and Fridays, from 9.15 to 10 a.m., Radio Gabon has a women's magazine. These broadcasts deal with such varied topics as mothers and children, women in the household, and promoting the status of women.

On Channel 2, Radio Gabon broadcasts, from Monday to Saturday between 9.30 and 10 a.m., the "At Your Service, Madam" programme put out by UFPDG.

From 4 to 4.30 p.m., from Monday to Friday, the Pan-African station Africa No. 1, which is received throughout the national territory, broadcasts "Women Speaking". In these broadcasts, an African woman gives her views on a topic about which she is knowledgeable.

As regards television, RTG Channel 1 (Radio Diffusion Télévision Gabonaise) used to broadcast the "A tire d'elles" programme* every Monday evening. At present, there is no broadcast specifically for women on any of the three television channels. Some might claim that women have not been overlooked, since there are broadcasts which deal with topics which are of the greatest relevance to women ("Your Rights, My Rights", "Hello Doctor", etc.) and that it is important to avoid the pitfall of discriminating against women by having broadcasts exclusively for them. This is to ignore the fact that women, through the broadcasts intended specifically for them, can exchange ideas and experiences concerning the small matters and domestic and family problems which make up their daily lives, concerns which fall outside the major debates on social, political and economic issues.

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* Translator's note: The title is a play on words which is untranslatable.

As regards the press, the column "Women and society" appears on an irregular basis in the national daily "L'Union". UFPDG publishes "AKASSI", and the Secretariat of State for the Advancement of the Status of Women has regularly issued, since March 1985, a quarterly information bulletin entitled "Femmes Gabonaises".

The situation thus described is not such that we can deny that women are left to fend for themselves in Gabon as far as information is concerned. A number of factors contribute to this state of affairs.

(1) In Gabon very few women have positions of administrative control in the information and popularization fields. As the following table shows, women are not to be found at the information planning level - they are merely functionaries. This amounts to saying that the decision-makers as regards the dissemination of information are men.

Type of enterprise	Year	Managerial Posts		
		Total	Men	Women
Management (information)	1975-1980 1983	5 8	4 7	1 1
RTG Channel 1	1975-1980 1983	11 30	9 27	2 3
RTG Channel 2	1975 1983	0 11	0 10	0 1
Africa No. 1	1975 1983	0 6	0 5	0 1

(2) The attitude of women to information is highly complex, and cannot always be described as positive. Gabonese women who are able to read and have access to information show marked indifference. They are indifferent to every kind of broadcast, publication or meeting, and it cannot be said that habits of reading and listening are widespread in Gabon. Some rightly or wrongly point to their status as women to explain this: duties as mothers, home-makers and wives, and sometimes professional responsibilities, do not give them the time they need to inform themselves. At best, they may be able to listen to a broadcast at mealtimes.

Another category of women, on the other hand, lack the education and background necessary to take an interest in what is offered to them. These illiterate women need a form of communication in which images associated with the local language play a more important role than the written message.

Women intellectuals (who are, it must be admitted, few in number) complain of being unable to find, particularly in the press, the kind of information they need. However, there is an element of contradiction in their attitude to the efforts made locally to produce publications intended for them. They prove indifferent, or indeed dismissive, towards such publications.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The actual participation of women in the work of national development is strengthened by the efficiency they acquire as a result of education and training.

EDUCATION AT SCHOOL

While formerly parents willingly sent their sons to school, they preferred to keep their daughters in the village, hoping to marry them off in exchange for a substantial marriage settlement. Soon enough, parents and daughters became aware of the benefits provided by education.

Accordingly, the daughters rushed to the school benches. For its part, the Government was able to cope with the situation by establishing the necessary facilities to take in this new school population. As regards education, it must be said that there is equality of opportunity between girls and boys in Gabon.

There are virtually as many girls as boys entering preparatory year 1 (C.P.1), but the number of girls can be seen to decline towards the upper end of the primary school classes. In Gabon as a whole, there were 5,622 boys and 5,619 girls of six years of age in preparatory year 1. Assuming that seven years 1/ previously approximately as many girls as boys entered preparatory year 1, on 1 January 1975 there were 1,343 boys and 1,092 girls in secondary year 2 (C.M.2) for the whole of the national territory. This represents a proportion of 44.8 per cent. 2/

It should be pointed out that the school drop-out rate among girls is very high, particularly in secondary-level classes. This is the result of various factors, not the least being early marriage and motherhood.

In the case of girls whose future was compromised by pregnancy, Law No. 3/69 of 1 June 1969 obliged the man to marry the girl who found herself in this predicament.

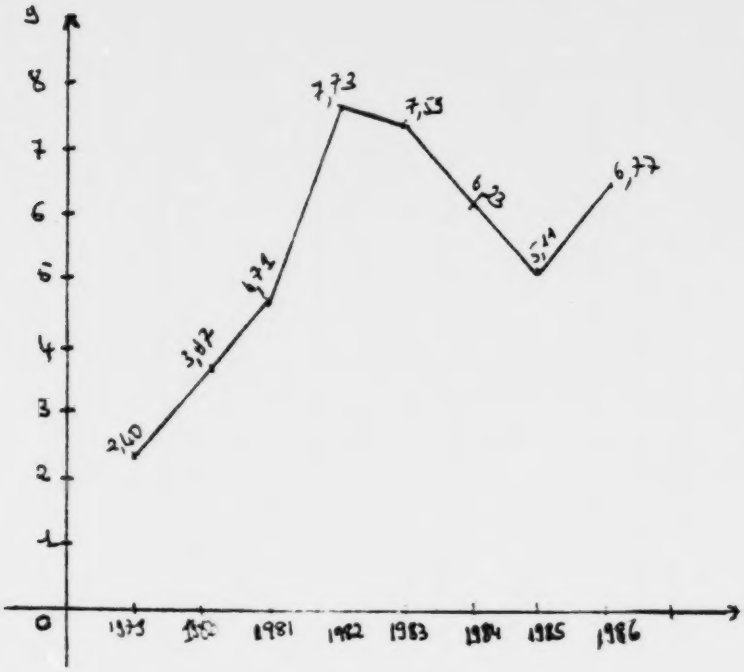
For those girls who pass the baccalauréat, the doors of scientific and technical institutions are open. Thus, year by year, female students are appearing in the enrolments of the following institutions: National Higher Institute of Engineering at Libreville (ENSIL), National Institute of Management Sciences (INSG), Faculty of Sciences, University Centre for Health Sciences (CUSS). As regards vocational training as such, girls are found in such traditionally masculine sections of the Vocational Apprenticeship Centres (CAPs) as the following: surveying, electrical engineering, electricity and building, industrial electronics, etc. Girls are even enrolled in the Trades Centre of the Gabon Energy and Water Company (SEEG).

1/ Allowing for the possibility of a repeated year.

2/ Figures from the statistical yearbooks of the National Education Department.

PROPORTION OF THE STATE INVESTMENT BUDGET ALLOCATED TO EDUCATION

Year	1979	1980	1981	1982	1983	1984	1985	1986
Amount	1 884	3 351	6 189	1 305	18 242	16 796	17 798	19 018
Percentage	2.40	3.97	4.71	7.73	7.59	6.23	5.11	6.77



Educational cycles	1970			1985			Increase	
	Enrolled	Girls	% Girls	Enrolled	Girls	% Girls	In number of girls	In percentage of girls
Primary	94 914	43 368	47.79	178 813	88 348	49.40	42 980	1.61
General secondary	10 783	2 962	27.46	25 815	11 195	43.36	8 233	15.90
Technical	1 273	222	17.43	7 850	2 323	29.59	2 101	12.16
Teacher training	136	18	13.23	5 679	2 862	50.39	2 844	37.16
TOTAL	107 106	48 570	45.34	218 157	104 728	48.00	56 158	2.66

In 15 years the total number of girls rose by 56,158 pupils, and the percentage of girls rose by 2.66. Equality of the sexes has been achieved in primary and higher education. It is well on the way in secondary general and technical education.

RESULTS ACHIEVED BY GIRLS IN SOME EXAMINATIONS IN 1985

Educational Cycle	Examination - Special subject	Total pupils	Girls	% girls
PRIMARY	Certificate of elementary primary studies	11 282	4,607	40.8
1st cycle	Certificate of first-cycle studies (BEPC)	1 387	487	35.1
2nd cycle GENERAL SECONDARY	Baccalauréat series A	194	*	-
	B	189	-	-
	C	63	-	-
	D	223	-	-
	E	13	-	-
TECHNICAL	Vocational apprenticeship commercial: accounting	45	22	48.9
	Vocational apprenticeship commercial: shorthand/typing	18	13	72.2
	Vocational apprenticeship, industrial	219	0	0
	Technical studies certificate: Commercial: accounting	87	45	51.7
	Technical studies certificate: Commercial: secretarial	12	10	83.3
	Technical studies certificate: Industrial	99	1	1
	Technical baccalauréats	253	*	-
1st cycle	Teacher training certificate	538	250	46.5
TEACHER TRAINING Vocational training	Teaching diploma (primary teachers)	68	34	50
	Teaching certificate (head teachers) 1st part	198	59	29.8
	Teaching certificate (head teachers) 2nd part	111	21	18.9

* The number of girls is not available.

NUMBERS IN EACH HIGHER EDUCATIONAL ESTABLISHMENT BROKEN DOWN BY SEX

Omar Bongo University establishments	Gabonese			Establishments under dual supervision	Gabonese		
	Boys	Girls	Total		Boys	Girls	Total
Fac. Law and Economics	443	150	593	CUSPOD	270	105	375
Fac. Arts and Humanities	405	148	553	ENA	48	6	54
Fac. Sciences	104	22	126	ENM	39	9	48
CUSS	125	108	233	ENEF	9	2	11
ENSIL	64	2	66	IAI	9	-	9
Annex, ENSIL	109	3	112				
NSG	56	14	70				
ESCAS	52	58	110				
National School for Higher Education (ENS)	147	39	186				
ENSET	81	-	81				
Total	1 586	544	2 130		375	122	497

Total in higher education = 2,637 Boys = 1,961
Girls = 666

Academic year 1982-1983

UNIVERSITY YEAR 1983/84
TOTAL NUMBER OF GABONESE STUDENTS IN EACH ESTABLISHMENT

Establishment	Boys	Girls	Total
Faculties			
Law and Economics	455	177	632
Arts and Humanities	366	142	508
Sciences	89	15	104
CUSS	144	102	246
Colleges			
ENSIL	76	3	79
Annex, ENSIL	108	7	115
INSG	52	11	63
ESCAS	37	64	101
ENS	164	43	207
ENSET	83		83
	1 574	564	2 138

UNIVERSITY YEAR 1984/85
TOTAL NUMBER OF GABONESE STUDENTS IN EACH ESTABLISHMENT

Establishment	Boys	Girls	Total
Faculties			
Law and Economics	483	197	680
Arts and Humanities	356	132	488
Sciences	82	17	99
CUSS	162	104	266
Colleges			
ENSIL	158	9	167
INSG	134	51	185
ENSS	5	51	56
ENS	204	60	264
ENSET	90	1	91
Total	1 674	622	2 296

UNIVERSITY YEAR 1985/86
TOTAL NUMBER OF GABONESE STUDENTS IN EACH ESTABLISHMENT

Establishment	Boys	Girls	Total
Faculties			
Law and Economics	479	210	689
Arts and Humanities	386	146	532
Sciences	132	24	156
CUSS	178	114	292
Colleges			
ENSIL	128	7	115
INSG	121	54	175
ENSS	-	68	68
ENS	168	57	225
ENSET	91	2	93
Total	1 693	682	2 375

VOCATIONAL TRAINING

Number of girls doing basic training (2 years)
in each centre, section and year

Centre and section	1982/83		1983/84		1984/85	
ONDIMBA + NKEMBO	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year
Typing		58				70
Shorthand/typing		59	158	-	-	70
Letter writing				10	45	
Management secretary		38	-	18		
Sales cashier			68	-	78	
Accounting I	-				73	
Accounting II	23	-		15	32	
Customs declarations	19	-	-	12	27	
General mechanic						
Motor mechanic						
Industrial electrician					2	-
Cold storage electrician	-	-	1	-	-	1
Mechanical electrician	1	-	-	2	6	-
Vehicle bodywork/painting						
Metal-worker/boiler-maker						
Modern bricklaying					1	
Carpentry						
Surveying			4	-	5	
Building/electricity supply		4	8	-	9	
Sculpture/carving						
Technical drawing						
Printing						
Total 917	43	159	239	57	278	141

Centre and section	1982/83		1983/84		1984/85	
VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, Port Gentil	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year
Typing		25	29			26
Shorthand/typing		25	29			28
Motor mechanic						
General mechanic						
Metal-worker/Boiler-maker						
Total 162		50	58			54

Centre and section	1982/83		1983/84		1984/85	
VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, Franceville	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year
Motor mechanic						
Building/electricity supply		8	4			17
Mechanical electrician					26	
Plumbing						
Typing		19	18			45
Shorthand/typing		16	28			20
Accounting I	28		17		19	-
Total 265	28	43	67		45	82

Centre and section	1982/83		1983/84		1984/85	
VOCATIONAL TRAINING CENTRE, Tchibanga	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year
Shortand/typing	11			5	26	
Typing	28			42		
Accounting I	5			8	16	
Total 141	44			55	42	

NUMBER OF GIRLS DOING BASIC TRAINING (2 YEARS) IN PRIVATE CENTRES APPROVED BY THE MINISTRY RESPONSIBLE FOR VOCATIONAL TRAINING AND CRAFTS

Principal future training course (Libreville)	1982/83		1983/84		1984/85	
	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year	1st year	2nd year
Accounting I	93	37	34	32	72	26
Shorthand/typing I	98	22	33	15	19	
Typing	164	45	158	107	296	127
Shorthand/typing II					66	
Insurance					16	5
Total	355	104	225	154	469	158
Specialized and further training centre for women's careers (Libreville)						
Hostess	40	35	33	13	27	10
Dressmaking	18	-	16	2	30	-
Hairdressing	25	8	17	8	32	4
Total	83	43	66	23	89	14
Gabon secretarial school (Libreville)						
Accounting I	5	2	15		12	1
Shorthand/typing	14	6	22	3	20	6
Typing	65	15	80	40	80	60
Total	84	23	117	43	112	67
Sainte-Marie vocational apprenticeship centre (Libreville)						
Carpentry						
Domestic skills (dressmaking)	25	25	25	25	No training	
Bricklaying						
Total = 100	25	25	25	25	-	-

WOMEN IN THE MEDICAL SERVICE

The early days of medicine in Gabon were the preserve of men, but today there are women in the health service and the proportion of women doctors is increasing. However, women account for over half of the nursing staff (67 per cent of State nurses in 1984).

The State has also decided to raise the training requirement for midwives. They are now recruited not after the certificate of first cycle studies but after the baccalauréat. They are thus integrated in the CUSS personnel.

Taking advantage of a general measure, many women health workers have taken professional examinations to expand their career horizons and enter the various levels of the medical profession.

There are increasing numbers of women in the higher levels of the service (pharmacists, biologists, general medical practitioners, etc.). Of the 1984 diploma-holders from CUSS and other foreign schools, 16 Gabon nationals have chosen to join the public service, including 9 women. 1/

Nevertheless, there are very few specialists among women doctors in Gabon. Apart from those who started their training in pharmacy, biochemistry or biology very early, there are still no gynaecologists, pediatricians or other women specialists. This is because most of them, having been locally trained at CUSS, practise for a number of years before beginning their specialization.

DIPLOMAS FROM THE NATIONAL SCHOOL OF HEALTH AND SOCIAL ACTION (ENSAS) AT LIBREVILLE, PER YEAR, SECTION AND SEX

Sections	June 1984				June 1985			
	Girls	Boys	Total	% girls	Girls	Boys	Total	% girls
Medicine	209	48	257	81	168	42	210	80
Administration	29	22	51	57				
Health engineering		7	7	-		7	7	
Social studies	26	6	32	81	45	5	50	90
Total	264	83	347	76	213	54	267	80

Statistics taken from information in notes No. 425/MSPP/DGSP/DENAS (year 1985) and No. 353/ENSAS/DIR (year 1984), setting out the results of the school teaching programme diploma examinations.

1/ Figures taken from the list of candidates for inclusion drawn up by the Personnel Department of the Ministry of Public health and Population.

UNIVERSITY YEAR 1985/86
GABONESE TEACHING STAFF

Establishment Faculties	Assistants and similar grades			Senior assistants			Lecturers			Professors		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Law and Economics	15	/	15	3	/	3	6	/	6	1	/	1
Arts and Humanities	23	7	30	17	2	19	2		2	/	/	-
Sciences	10	1	11	8	2	10	2	/	2	/	/	/
CUSS	10	1	11	4	/	4	12	1	13	1	/	1
Colleges												
ENSIL	2	/	2	1	/	1						
INSG	4	2	6	-	-							
ENSS	-	-	-	-	-	-						
ENS	8	3	11	2	1	3						
ENSET	1	-	1	2	/	2			23			2
			87			42						

UNIVERSITY YEAR 1984/85
GABONESE TEACHING STAFF

Establishment Faculties	Assistants and similar grades			Senior assistants			Lecturers			Professors		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Law and Economics			12			4			5			1
Arts and Humanities			23			19			2			-
Sciences			10			12			2			-
CUSS			9			1			9			4
ENSIL			2			1			-			-
INSG			4			-			-			-
ENS			11			4			-			-
ENSS			1			-			-			-
ENSET			1			2			-			

UNIVERSITY YEAR 1983/84
GABONESE TEACHING STAFF

Establishment Faculties	Assistants and similar grades			Senior assistants			Lecturers			Professors		
	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total	Men	Women	Total
Law and Economics			11			4			4			-
Arts and Humanities			19			20			2			-
Sciences			9			13			2			-
CUSS			9			5			11			-
ENSIL			2			1			-			-
INSG			3			-			-			-
ENS			13			2						-
ENSET			-			3			-			-

WOMEN IN TEACHING

It is part of the history of schooling in Gabon that education was pioneered by men. Gradually, as in all other branches of economic activity, men turned to new careers, making way for women.

For this reason women were first represented in primary education.

For its part, the National School for Higher Education has for some years been turning out feamle graduates for the labour market. These women have found posts in various colleges and schools in Gabon. The head of Bessieux College in Libreville is a woman. The head teachers of the State schools in Port Gentil and Koula-Moutou are women.

There are a few women in higher education, including a doctor of nuclear physics in the Faculty of Sciences. In 1982, the Head of the English Department at Omar Bongo University was a woman. The Sociology Department is currently directed by a woman.

LITERACY AMONG WOMEN

The difficulties as regards literacy among women are a reflection of the general literacy situation in Gabon: the literacy programmes undertaken in Gabon since it became independent have always proved a failure. Thus, in the interior of the country, at Bitam, women who wish to take literacy courses have no instructor. Nevertheless, these enterprising women club together to be able to make some payment to people of goodwill who are ready to give them a few lessons. 1/

In Libreville, the Union of Women of the Gabonese Democratic Party, in collaboration with the Popular Education service, has striven to promote literacy among adult women. However, it has not been possible to achieve the anticipated results for a number of reasons, including a lack of perseverance on the part of the candidates themselves.

1/ Compare the grievances aired by the women of Bitam during the nationwide tour by the Secretary of State for the Advancement of Women.

WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE

At least 80 per cent of the work involved in farming production is carried out by women in Gabon. This means that agriculture relies on women (as elsewhere in Africa). In fact, all that the men do is to clear areas for cultivation. All subsequent operations are carried out by women: further clearance after burning, sowing, weeding and hoeing, harvesting and the transport of products from the fields to the village and from the village to the sales point, if necessary, not forgetting the processing of these products (e.g. cassava).

The only crops which men cultivate are the cash crops - coffee and cocoa.

The Fifth Plan (1984-1988) provides for 123 billion CFA francs of investment for agriculture and livestock raising; the development of this sector is one of the priority targets of the Plan. Alongside the establishment of agro-industry blocks, the Government is planning to launch pilot integrated rural development operations making use of training structures and aiming to promote modern family farming, and to create infrastructures and services that will permit the improvement of production and marketing conditions and of the standard of living of people living in the country, with a view to halting the drift to the towns.

However, halfway through the Plan, the Integrated Zonal Operations (OZI) are running into difficulties one after another. The Lébamba co-operative, for instance, set out to introduce open country cultivation to replace itinerant farming on patches of burnt land. This involved the uprooting of trees, work that was initially done by men, but is now carried out by women. The men have gradually lost interest in farming tasks in the co-operative. The only men now found at the co-operative merely deal with the administration. Social attitudes are another obstacle: the only woman who began to operate a tractor had to give up using this efficient item of equipment as a result of pressure from her peers who predicted dreadful misfortunes for this pioneer. On top of this there is the problem of disposal of products. The lorries made available to members of the co-operative by the Ministry of Agriculture to carry the produce to the main urban centres did not comply with the established timetable and harvests were thus lost.

An expert from IFAD (International Fund for Agricultural Development) visited Gabon in October 1986 to identify relevant projects and made the following observations regarding rural women:

(a) There is a serious lack of technical training for women: sociological constraints extend to the popularization of farming techniques. Women should be used to pass the message on to their rural sisters.

(b) Despite attempts by the Government to stop it, the drift to the towns has continued to increase.

(c) The everyday life of rural women is very hard: too much work, rudimentary techniques and tools and absence of certain social infrastructures.

POLITICAL LIFE

Legal equality between the sexes is guaranteed by Constitutional Law No. 1/01 of 21 February 1961 (article 1) and Law 5/78 of 1 June 1978 (articles 7, 17 and 84).

The National Council of Gabonese Women was established in 1961 with the task of assisting in the definition of policy for the advancement of women and of deciding the ways of implementing such policy in all strata of society, both in the urban centres and in the countryside. The political leaders expected this action in favour of women to trigger off widespread interest and action to promote the moral, intellectual and material progress of women in Gabon.

This policy was subsequently given greater impetus by the establishment of the Office of the High Commissioner for the Advancement of Women under Mrs. Nzao-Mabicka in 1974.

In 1970, there were already 6 (six) women members of the Political Bureau. Today there are 4 (four) women members of the Government, 9 (nine) women Ministerial Delegates, 2 (two) women High Counsellors of State, 25 (twenty-five) women members of parliament, 1 (one) woman mayor (of the country's economic capital), 1 (one) woman minister-ambassador and 1 (one) woman President of the Audit Division.

Within the Gabonese Democratic Party there are 4 (four) members of the Political Bureau, 23 (twenty-three) women members of the Central Committee and 1 (one) woman Federal Secretary. At the base, women take an active part in the political life of Gabon. Thus they are members of the various committees in their enterprises or members of cells of the Union of Women of the Gabonese Democratic Party. The Union of Women of the Gabonese Democratic Party is an organization for the political training and involvement of women. The Union of Women has the following structure: each of the 9 (nine) provinces in Gabon has a Permanent Secretary, and then comes the Regional leader, the local leader and, finally, the group leader.

The Union of Women of the Gabonese Democratic Party, as described above, is an essential tool to enable the authorities to include Gabonese women in the process of national development and to deal with any inequality which may arise in the position of women.

Another institution designed to assist women is the Secretariat of State for the Advancement of Women. At government level, the task of this department is to apply and to ensure application of government policy in favour of women and to promote measures designed to improve their status and to ensure respect for their rights. Before it became an independent department in March 1983, between 1977 and 1983 it took the form of a simple division for the situation of women within other ministries, such as the Ministry of Public Health and Population and, subsequently, the Ministry of Social Affairs.

The Secretariat of State for the Advancement of Women has the following structure: in addition to the Ministerial Office, there is a Directorate-General comprising 4 (four) technical directorates: the Directorate for Information, the Directorate for Studies and Programming, the Directorate for the Status of Women and the Directorate for Activities. The organization chart of this young department envisages the establishment of provincial services for the advancement of women throughout the country.

Notwithstanding all the steps taken to enhance their status and to protect them, women in Gabon are still reluctant to take this opportunity and sometimes find themselves in an ambiguous situation. One example of this can be seen in the

fact that, although a law was promulgated in 1963 to prohibit dowries, 23 years later dowries still continue to be paid and accepted all over Gabon.

This is not only because the girl's family insists on it, but also because the girl herself wishes it. Indeed, she will sometimes dispute the amount set by her family if she considers it to be a too low in view of her school or university qualifications and her physical capabilities.

WOMEN AND EMPLOYMENT

The equality of opportunity that exists in education is logically reflected in the world of employment. However, this only applies in theory because, in fact, women are hindered on the job market, coming up against two principal obstacles:

(a) Inadequate qualifications;

(b) Social attitudes.

There are many women in Gabon who gave up their studies for one reason or another, particularly early pregnancies, and have then had to enter the job market without qualifications, becoming trained on the job. However, for those who have the courage, there are vocational schools (School of Health, Teacher-training School, Port Gentil School of Commerce, etc.) and vocational training centres where they may achieve a certain level of qualification in the job of their choice.

A. WORKING WOMEN IN THE PUBLIC SECTOR

Law No. 24/63 of 31 May 1963 setting out general provisions for the civil service contained some discriminatory articles, particularly the following:

> Article 7 ... "In the application of the present provisions, no distinction shall be made between the sexes.
>
> However, the particular statutes organizing the civil service sections may, because of the physical aptitudes required of officials or the particular constraints of certain functions, restrict access to certain sections of the service to male candidates."
>
> Article 8, paragraph 4: "... Likewise, when the spouse of a prefect and magistrate is also an official, said spouse may not occupy public office in the administrative area in which her husband performs his functions."

The revision of the general provisions for the civil service in 1967 gave rise to a new law, i.e. Law No. 9/67 of 16 June 1967 setting out general provisions governing civil servants. Here, the paragraph of article 8 of the former general provisions for the civil service mentioned above has simply been deleted. Article 7 has undergone some amendment (see text below).

Law No. 9/67 of 16 June 1967 setting out general provisions for civil servants.

Chapter 1:

Statutory provisions.

Article 7. In the application of the present provisions, no distinction shall be made between the sexes.

However, because of the requirements of physical aptitude or the particular constraints of certain functions, particular statutes may restrict access to certain sections of the service to male or to female candidates.

Article 10. When the spouse of an official carries on a private profit-making activity, this must be declared by the official concerned to the relevant Minister who shall take steps to protect the interests of the service.

Article 11. When the spouse of an official exercising authority or inspection functions is also an official, this must be declared by the official concerned to the relevant Minister who may, in conjunction with the Minister for the Civil Service, take any steps necessary to protect the interests of the service.

In 1984 there were 657 women teachers (29 per cent of the total of 2,240 teachers) and 138 women head teachers (21.5 per cent of the total of 639 head teachers) in primary education in Gabon.

In general secondary education, there were 386 women out of a total of 1,411 teachers (27 per cent). In technical secondary education there were 26 women out of 173 teachers (15 per cent).

In the Ministry of Agriculture there are six women out of 106 agricultural inspectors (drivers) (5.6 per cent) - mainly graduates of the Oyem Rural Training School.

The National Forests and Waterways School has also trained some women. There are seven women among the 91 assistant waterways and forests technicians (7.6 per cent) and five women among the 72 waterways and forests inspectors (6.9 per cent).

The National School of Health and Social Action trains most health service personnel. There are 143 women out of 213 State nurses (67 per cent), 357 women out of 633 nursing assistants (56 per cent), 49 women midwives out of 58 (84 per cent), 59 women out of 132 assistant laboratory technicians (44.6 per cent), three women dental assistants, 11 women out of 15 assistant pharmacists (73 per cent) and three women out of 17 assistant radiologists (17.6 per cent).

Women who have reached further education and obtained scientific or technical diplomas in various branches of economic activity prefer to focus their attention on private enterprises where jobs are far better paid. However, employers cannot shake off the prejudice that, because they belong to the so-called weaker sex, these women cannot perform their jobs as easily as their male colleagues. Furthermore, employers feel that women are unable to reconcile their professional life and their family life. This holds them back when decisions are taken regarding promotion to posts of responsibility. The legal provisions indicated below might provide a justification for employers' reticence. As far as women are concerned, however, these texts are particularly important. They allow women to absent themselves to give birth, to swell the nation!

Here are some extracts from the Gabonese Labour Code. Law No. 5/78 of 1 June 1978 provides as follows:

Article 117. Any pregnant woman whose condition has been medically established or whose pregnancy is apparent shall be entitled, in connection with her confinement, to interrupt her work for 14 consecutive weeks, including six weeks before the anticipated date of the birth of the child.

This interruption, which shall not be considered a cause for terminating the contract, may be extended by three weeks in the event of a duly established illness resulting from the pregnancy or confinement. During this period the employer may not dismiss the woman in question.

Article 118. During her maternity leave, the woman shall be entitled to free medical care and the entire wage or salary she was receiving at the time she went on maternity leave, at the expense of the National Social Security Fund. She shall retain the right to benefits in kind.

Article 119. An employer may not knowingly use the services of a woman during the eight weeks following her confinement.

Article 120. For a period of 15 months, as from the date on which she resumes work, the mother shall be entitled to breaks to allow her to feed her baby. The total length of these breaks may not exceed two hours each working day.

During this period, the mother may leave her work definitively without notice and without being required to pay compensation for breaking her contract.

Article 126. ... Mothers shall be entitled to one extra day's leave per year for each dependent child.

N.B.: Women receiving benefits from the National Social Security Fund (CNSS) or whose husbands receive benefits from the said organization shall receive pre-natal benefits: 6,000 CFA francs on the first pre-natal check-up in the third month of pregnancy, 7,500 CFA francs on the second pre-natal check-up in the sixth month and 8,000 CFA francs when the child is born. In the eighth month they receive a layette worth 35,000 CFA francs.

Here are a few figures regarding women in senior positions in the Gabon civil service in 1984:

Customs

4 women out of 42 central customs inspectors (9.5 per cent)
1 woman out of 34 customs officers (2.9 per cent)

Taxes

3 women central tax inspectors out of 25 (12 per cent)

Statistics

2 women out of 11 economic statisticians (18 per cent)
1 woman out of 10 statisticians (10 per cent)

Treasury

1 woman central treasury inspector out of 26 (3.8 per cent)
1 woman treasury inspector out of 10 (10 per cent)

Infrastructure and equipment

2 women public works engineers out of 43 (4.6 per cent)

Data processing

1 woman data processing engineer out of 13 (7.6 per cent)
4 women computer systems engineers out of 17 (23.5 per cent)

Information media

4 women senior production inspectors out of 25 (16 per cent)
2 women journalistic assistants out of 18 (11 per cent)
2 women radio/TV engineers out of 20 (10 per cent)

Health

3 women pharmacists out of 12 (25 per cent)
25 women medical doctors out of 120 (20.8 per cent)
1 woman specialist physician out of 3 (33 per cent)

Higher education

14 women assistant teachers out of 90 (15.5 per cent)
21 women assistants out of 98 (21.4 per cent), mainly in the Faculty of Arts and Humanities.

MEMBERS OF THE LEGAL PROFESSION AT 1 SEPTEMBER 1986

I. Magistrates (category A1)

(a) Active (distribution by jurisdiction or service)

Assignment	Men	Women
Office of the Minister of Justice	2	
Secretariat-General	1	
General Inspectorate for the Judicial Services	2	
Directorate for Criminal Affairs and Clemency	1	1 = Head of Service
Directorare for Civil Affairs and the Seal	1	1 = Director
National Magistrates' School	1	
Office of the President of the Supreme Court	1	
Administrative Chamber of the Supreme Court	2	
Audit Division of the Supreme Court	6	2 = 1 President
Judicial Division of the Supreme Court	9	1 = Attorney-General
Libreville Appeal Court	8	6
Franceville Appeal Court	7	1
Libreville Court	12	9
Port Gentil Court	9	
Lambarené Court	3	
Tchibanga Court	3	
Oyem Court	4	2 - 1 President of the Court
Franceville Court	7	
Makokou Court	3	
Koula-Moutou Court	3	
Mouila Court	3	
	88	23

N.B. Women in posts of responsibility

1 Head of Service in the Directorate for Criminal Affairs and Clemency;

1 Director for Civil Affairs and the Seal;

1 President of the Audit Division of the Supreme Court;

1 Attorney-General in the Judicial Division of the Supreme Court;

1 President of the Court at Oyem.

(b) On secondment

Men	Women
20	2 Namely, the Secretary of State for the Advancement of Women and the Mayor of Port Gentil

(c) On sick leave

Men	Women

(d) On stand-by

Men	Women
1	

(e) On training courses

Men	Women
6	3

II. Staff offices of the Clerks of Court and Prosecutors' Offices

Grade	Men	Women	Total
Chief Clerk of a Higher Court and Chief Secretary of the Attorney-General's Office (Cat. A1)	3	2	5
Chief Clerk of Court and Chief Secretary of the Prosecutor's Office (Cat. A2)	15	9	24
Clerk of Court and Secretary of the Prosecutor's Office (Cat. B1)	45	14	59
Deputy Clerk of Court and Assistant Secretary of the Prosecutor's Office (Cat. B2)	71	42	113
Assistant to the Clerk of Court and Prosecutor's Office	8	13	21
Total	142	80	222

Summary:

I. Magistrates:	Men = 118	Women = 28
II. Staff of the offices of the Clerks of Court and Prosecutors' Office:	Men = 102	Women = 80
Total:	220	108

PROPORTION OF WOMEN AMONG SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS IN 1984

Directors-General, Central Administration, 3 women out of 48 (6.25 per cent)

Directors, Central Administration, 21 women out of 223 (9.4 per cent)

First Counsellors of Embassies, 6 women out of 60 (10 per cent)

State Prosecutor, 1 woman out of 8 (12.5 per cent)

PROPORTION OF WOMEN RECRUITED INTO THE GABON CIVIL SERVICE BETWEEN 1980 AND 1985

Year recruited	% women	Women	Men	Total
1980	25.52	521	1 520	2 041
1981	22.78	373	1 264	1 637
1982	22.99	390	1 306	1 696
1983	27.14	499	1 339	1 838
1984	21.57	521	1 894	2 415
1985	16.32	249	1 276	1 525
Total	22.89	2 553	8 599	11 152

MARITAL STATUS OF WOMEN IN THE GABON CIVIL SERVICE (FEBRUARY 1986)

Marital status	% women	Women	Men	Total
Single	20.34	3 664	14 347	18 011
Married	19.58	1 976	8 114	10 090
Widowed	68.37	80	37	117
Divorced	62.27	170	103	273

PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN EACH HIERARCHICAL CATEGORY IN THE GABON CIVIL SERVICE (FEBRUARY 1986)

Category	% women	Women	Men	Total
0	22.41	184	637	821
1 A1	16.39	472	2 407	2 879
2 A2	20.57	648	2 501	3 149
3 B1	18.08	1 390	6 296	7 686
4 B2	35.91	1 591	2 839	4 430
5 C	15.40	1 361	7 472	8 833
6	35.11	243	449	692
9	100.00	1	0	1

PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN THE GABON CIVIL SERVICE BY TYPE OF CONTRACT

Status	% women	Women	Men	Total
Particular cases	15.38	14	77	91
Civil servant	29.71	3 479	8 228	11 707
Local contract under the statute	35.27	1 332	2 444	3 776
Expatriate contract under the statute	22.48	255	879	1 134
Contract outside the statute	16.51	54	273	327
Military	6.59	756	10 700	11 456

PROPORTION OF WOMEN IN MINISTERIAL DEPARTMENTS (FEBRUARY 1986)

Department	% women	Women	Men	Total
President's Office	35.08	127	171	362
Office of the Prime Minister	25.45	14	41	55
Political offices	28.26	130	330	460
Gabonese Democratic Party (PDG)	36.15	47	83	130
Secretariat-General for Government	60	3	2	5
Office of the Deputy Prime Minister	15.78	3	16	19
Foreign Affairs	29.42	123	295	418
Relations with Assemblies	13.33	2	13	15
National Archives	30	9	21	30
State Supervision	24	6	19	25
National Defence	9.27	60	587	647
Presidential Guard	0.19	3	1 566	1 569
National Gendarmerie	7.80	194	2 292	
Land and Naval Forces	5.90	191	3 041	
Air Forces	948	78	744	
Fire-fighting Service	0.00	0	179	179
National Police Forces	8.63	166	1 757	1 923
Public Security	1.29	3	229	232
Justice, Keeper of the Seals	26.54	86	238	324
Administration of the Territory and Local Communities	17.57	129	605	734
Information, Postal Services and Telecommunications	19.22	84	353	437
Civil Service	32.33	97	203	300
Prison Security	19.48	61	252	313
Road Safety	12.50	3	21	24
Finance	21	243	914	1 157
Ministry for Small and Medium Enterprises	0.00	0	12	12
Planning	18.75	24	104	128
Land and Registration	29.85	20	47	67
Commerce	34.42	21	40	61
Industry	15.78	3	16	19
Cadastral Survey	9.33	7	68	75
Holdings	63.63	7	4	11
Economy	32.14	9	19	28

Department	% women	Women	Men	Total
Farming and Livestock	10.27	38	332	370
Waterways and Forests	7.19	30	387	417
Mining and Hydrocarbons	15.00	15	85	100
Public Works and Equipment	5.86	24	385	409
Town Planning and Housing	5.55	2	34	36
Water Resources and Energy	15.38	2	11	13
Environment	26.66	4	11	15
Development of the National Territory	41.17	7	10	17
Human Resources	6.66	1	14	15
Transport	29.62	8	19	27
Civil Aviation	20.89	28	106	134
Tourism	25	9	27	36
Merchant Navy	9.30	4	39	43
State Education	30.14	1 956	4 533	6 489
Vocational Training	18.60	16	70	86
Youth and Sport	12.55	30	209	239
Higher Education	32.40	128	267	395
Culture and the Arts	20.58	28	108	136
Scientific Research	20.58	21	81	102
Popular Education	12.74	13	89	102
Crafts	0.00	0	1	1
Public Health	55.17	1 321	1 073	2 394
Labour and Employment	26.27	31	87	118
Social Affairs	75.00	165	55	220
Advancement of Women	55.55	5	4	9
Social Security	0.00	0	2	2
Welfare	0.00	0	2	2
Staff in special posts	6.52	3	43	46

B. WORKING WOMEN IN THE PRIVATE AND SEMI-PUBLIC SECTOR

There are few women in the workforce in the private and semi-public sector. At 31 December 1984, the number of women was 11,970, representing only 17.15 per cent of the total workforce. It might be thought that female economic activity is concentrated primarily in the informal sector, since the structured sector is even newer for them than for men. However, this low proportion is distributed in a standard manner in the various careers surveyed. Administrative jobs account for over 40 per cent of all working women. Likewise, there are more women than men in the textile sector - the only area in which women predominate. More than 26 per cent of the women surveyed are involved in ordinary manual labour; this means maintenance and domestic work primarily.

Miscellaneous occupations and commerce occupy appreciable numbers of women.

In addition, the following table indicates that women are represented very little in occupations of a technical character (precision work, metalworking or engineering, for instance) or physically demanding jobs (mining).

WORKFORCE BROKEN DOWN BY JOB AND SEX (1984)

Occupations	Total	Men		Women		% women's occupations*
		Number	%	Number	%	
Jobs in agriculture	3 860	3 314	85.85	546	14.14	4.56
Jobs in transport	8 861	8 698	98.16	163	1.83	1.36
Jobs in commerce	2 327	1 639	70.43	688	29.56	5.74
Jobs in administration	11 430	6 583	57.59	4 847	42.40	40.49
Miscellaneous	7 594	5 941	78.23	1 653	21.76	13.80
Ordinary labour	12 819	9 640	75.20	3 179	24.79	26.55
Jobs in mining	1 230	1 221	99.26	9	0.73	0.07
Jobs in building	6 049	5 973	98.74	76	1.25	0.63
Jobs in the wood industry	2 857	2 795	97.82	62	2.17	0.51
Jobs in the chemical industry	585	529	90.42	56	9.57	0.46
Jobs in textiles	501	182	36.32	319	63.67	2.66
Electrical work	2 632	2 569	97.60	63	2.39	0.52
Jobs in metalworking	6 520	6 481	99.40	39	0.59	0.32
Jobs in the agro-food industry	774	585	75.58	189	24.41	1.57
Precision work	1 262	1 245	98.65	17	1.34	0.14
Unspecified	490	426	86.93	64	13.06	0.53
Total	69 791	57 821	100.00	11 970	100.00	100.00
% M - W		82.84		17.15		

* This percentage indicates the share of the occupation within the entire range of the occupations in which women are engaged.

CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion reached by the Office of the Sub-Regional Committee for Central Africa I for the Integration of Women in the Development Process (January 1986) is applicable to Gabon - i.e. Gabon is not caused any difficulties by the principles set out in the Declaration on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. Since 1960, when Gabon achieved political independence, it has endeavoured to involve women in the nation's development, not just as beneficiaries, but also as agents of that development.

It goes without saying that, in order to attain this objective, the Gabonese authorities have given women equal opportunities with men. With this in mind, they have stressed education, training and information for girls and women, as these three parameters are the basis for women's effective participation in national development and thus in their own betterment and development.

The achievements and statistics embodied in this report bear witness to the position of women in Gabon. Nevertheless, it must be noted that the difficult world economic situation, which has not spared Gabon, is delaying or restricting action for the advancement of women. Moreover, sociological attitudes also contribute to delays that are still observable in certain areas. The position of women in Gabonese society is, however, a comfortable one.